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Survey: Stamford has highest nursing home costs

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STAMFORD, Conn.

The highest nursing home costs in the country are in the Stamford area, a national survey has found.

Private rooms at nursing homes in the Stamford region cost an average of \$394 a day and \$144,000 a year, according to the survey by Westport-based MetLife Mature Market Institute. The daily average has increased about 6 percent since last year, the institute reported.

The New York City metro area is second on the most expensive list at about \$361 a day, followed by the Hartford area at \$359 a day. The metro areas of Boston and Cherry Hill, N.J., finished off the top five most expensive list, at \$309 and \$302 a day respectively.

The national average has remained essentially unchanged in the past two years at \$212 a day.

Marie Allen, executive director of the Southwestern Connecticut Agency on Aging, says one reason for the Stamford area's high costs is the region's high housing prices.

"So it follows that nursing homes would be more expensive in the region," Allen said.

Area nursing home administrators cite other factors.

"The bulk of the costs we face are labor-related," said Wendy Kaufman, an assistant administrator at Courtland Gardens Health Care Center in Stamford.

Kaufman said her nursing home and others in Fairfield County are offering higher pay to attract the most talented nurses because there is a shortage in the profession. The county is also stifled by traffic and long commutes.

"No one wants to sit in bumper-to-bumper traffic," she said. "Because of the commute, the pay rate is higher in the health care field."

Medicaid pays the bills for most nursing home residents. Nearly seven in 10 of the 27,446 nursing home residents in Connecticut are covered by Medicaid, according to the state Office of Policy and Management. Medicare pays for about 15 percent of residents, while 14 percent of patients pay the costs themselves,



according to OPM data.

Medicaid costs the state more than \$2 billion a year, said David Gottchen, a director of OPM's policy development and planning division. About 14 percent of the 2007 state budget was spent on long-term care expenses, Allen said.

Kaufman said that despite Medicaid covering most nursing home residents, many senior citizens remain anxious about long-term care costs.

"They still worry," Kaufman said. "Look what's going on with the government. All their Social Security benefits go to help the nursing home provide care, except for a small amount each month. But they worry about their children."

Information from: The Advocate, <http://www.stamfordadvocate.com>

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